

Hitchhiker to Montgomery

Driving toward Montgomery, Alabama, late one evening, two businessmen planned to spend the night in a small town on the way. They were making good time through some low country where the road was a few feet above the surrounding land. Their headlights picked up a figure far ahead. As they drew nearer, they discovered that it was a little old lady walking briskly along the side of the road. Slowing down to speak to her, they saw that she wore a pale lavender dress, freshly pressed and sparkling clean. Her hair was nearly done and she turned a smiling face to them. She seemed completely untroubled about walking down a lonely highway in the middle of the night.

When the men asked what she was doing on the road at that time of night, she laughingly explained that she had started out to visit her daughter and grandchildren in Montgomery. She had hoped, she said, to get a ride for at least part of the way, but no one had offered her a lift; so she had just kept on walking.

The two men said they would give her a lift as far as the next town, a two-hour drive, and she was delighted to accept. She sat in the back seat and, as they drove through the night, talked about her daughter and three grandchildren - their names, where they live, the children's school - the usual small talk among strangers. When the subject was exhausted, the men eventually became engrossed in business conversation and forgot about the passenger behind them.

When they reached their destination they stopped to let the elderly lady out. She was gone. Panic-stricken to think that she might have fallen out along the way, they headed back in search of her. But they found no signs of their passenger, even though they retraced their route to where they had picked her up, and saw her tiny footprints in the shoulder of the road where she had first talked to them.

Dismayed and mystified, they drove on to Montgomery and found her daughter's name and number in the local phone book. They

felt they had to tell her about what appeared to be a terrible accident. After listening to their story in bewilderment, the younger woman pointed to three photos on the mantel. Could they identify their passenger? They did, and she agreed that it was her mother. Without a doubt, they had talked to her. They went on to describe her dress, and the woman burst into tears. That was the dress, she said, her mother had worn when she last saw her.

"When was that?" they asked. The woman replied between sobs, "When she was buried, just three years ago today!"